

## POTENTIALS OF ART AND CRAFT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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### **Introduction**

The total educational development of the child cannot be neglected if society must move forward. Arts and crafts are vital to such development, (Banjoko, 2010). He asserts that art and craft are at the centre in the mental, psychological and physical growth of a child, adding that children learn better and faster through the play methods; through what they see and touch. They learn through scribbling, (drawing), painting, and constructing images (both recognizable and unrecognizable), Children also learn through singing, dancing and watching. Art and craft are the skills of making things by using hands. Children need art and craft in their growing stages to ensure the development of their brains. Through this, they can express themselves in different ways. Engaging children in creative activities help them develop skills and ingenuity.

Onibukun, (2017) said that from the time a child is conceived in the mother's womb, the starts growing and developing. He added that what starts as just a cell, blossoms into a beautiful and unique human being. But the growth doesn't stop once the infant has exited the womb. Children continue to grow all the way until they have fully matured and reached adulthood. During this time of their growth, the things parents incorporate into their lives are vital to what they become in future.

As the child grows, their brain also grows and develops mathematical and language skills and creativity. Also, their personality, likes and dislikes, and much more. There are several external factors that play major roles in the child's development. One of those being the active participation of arts and crafts, and basically because they are learned by children the play-way. Sure, arts and crafts can be messy, but children of all ages love them and they are actually good for them. (Sinclair et al, 2017).

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Concept of Art and Craft**

Art and craft are a wide range of skillful activities involving some that are imaginative, creative and aesthetic in nature, (Furst, 2020). The word art is derived from the Latin word 'ars' which mean 'skill'. Craft comes from the middle English word for 'strength' or 'skill' derived from the old English word *craeft* which comes from old high German word *kraft*, for strength and means 'skill' in planning, making, executing and by extension an occupation or trade, (Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary, (2020). The birth of the Art and Craft Movement dated back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. It was characterized by a style of fashion and decoration, which marked the beginning of a change in the value society placed on how things were made. (Mary, 2020). To be deduced from these is the fact

that artists/craftsmen are skilled individuals with the creative ability to express themselves in diverse ways.

Art is an expression and application of imagination and creative skill. Arts are traditionally seen as drawing, painting, and sculpture. Craft on the other hand is traditionally seen as a hobby or an occupation that requires skilled workers to produce an item. Crafts can include weaving, carving, pottery, embroidery, beading, sewing, quilting, etc. Craft may also be referred to as "handicraft," with their hand-made nature distinguishing them from other machine-based, (mass-made) products.

Art is defined as the product of creative human activity in which materials are shaped or selected to convey ideas, emotions, or visually interesting forms. The person that produces art works is called an artist. Arts can be referred to visual/performing arts, including drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, music, drama and dance. (Adewuya, 2009). Craft is the skillfulness needed in a particular handy profession. Craft on the other hand can be referred to handy works like jewelries, cutleries, furniture, decoration and fashion, (Ajayi, 2015).

Defining art/craft may seem abstract to those who expect them to be limited to familiar categories such as drawing, painting sculpture, weaving, pottery, brick-making and the likes. In today's modern world, art has moved away from being purely aesthetically pleasing to creating works with emotional impact that express their vision, ideas, or feelings and also utilitarian value.

Art and craft have always been closely linked and intertwined. We often speak of 'arts and crafts' as one discipline or activity, but however they are viewed, they both are forms of creativities that are often overlapping and placed side by side for contrast and comparison. However, many people do not perceive a difference between art and craft, since they are both creative and skillful activities aiming at what they perceive as same objectives. One unique thing about art and craft is that they affect almost every aspect of human's life. No wonder, Bernard, (2023) opined that art and craft are the general name to all skillful activities, therefore, all skillful activities are the offshoots of art and craft. For example, Ajayi, (2015) said an engineer, a medical doctor or a lawyer must be creative in the way they dispense or administer their works, adding that any professional that is not creative is doomed. Nzuaghah, (2010) stresses that both art and craft signify a doing, a making, a fashioning or putting together, and they usually imply that the thing is accomplished through the skills used, and also must create pleasing forms and sounds which satisfy the human sense of beauty and functionality.

### **The Child**

Onibokun, (2017) author of "Child Protection Measures in Nigeria" stated that "Childhood could be defined in a cultural and socio-economic term, even though chronological age is the more popular indicator". According to the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2008) dealing with children and young person's states that "a child means a person under the age of fourteen (14.)" A young person is one who is above 14 years of age but under seventeen. The 2019 National Child Welfare Policy defined a child as anybody who is twelve years or below. However, in line with the UN Convention (1990) the new Decree on the Rights of the Child in Nigeria (2016) adopts a person below eighteen (18) years as the age of the child.

The UN Convention (2010) defines a child as any human being below the age of eighteen (18), unless under the law applicable to his state, there is a different definition. It is well established that in traditional societies in West Africa in general, and in Nigeria in particular the span of childhood is much narrower than what is obtained at present in developed societies which until recently had a narrower span of childhood themselves. Oluka (2017), author of "Protection and Violation of Child Rights in Nigeria: An Overview" states that "Independent assessments of the threshold of age demarcation in different West African countries have identified 12 years as the upper limit of childhood in ethnic groups in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia (Callawa, 2016, Bartels,

2015, Ford, 2015) "The age of twelve represents the period when children were perceived as having attained mental and social adaptation to their environment to be able to solve the various problems which may confront them when they are not directly supervised by adults" (Oluka 2017).

### **How Children Learn**

Young children are not capable of mental activity or thinking in the same way as adults. Children learn through real action. When it is said that children are "active" learners, this must be taken in a literal sense. It is the reason, for example that Montessori, Slavin (2022), said that "play is the child's work". In play, the child is practicing the various actions that will eventually be internalized as thorough. Accordingly, however, convenient it may be for grownups to think of children as learning while they are sitting still, what they learn in this way is likely to be learnt by rote and to have little lasting value. In contrast, what children acquire through active manipulation of the environment is nothing less than the ability to think. According to Elbert, (2020) "One of the most serious and pernicious misunderstandings about young children is that they are most like adults in their thinking and least like adults in their feelings.

The young Child's inability to learn externally imposed rules that have special implications for the educational programmes to which he or she is subjected. It has already been noted that kids learn best through playing with and manipulating materials in their environment. Certainly, children can be accelerated in particular skills if they are taught long and hard enough. But the price may be too steep in regard to what the child missed or the emotional problems that ensued in the process. In general, a child who elaborates the skills he does have, such as the ability to order materials, is likely to be better prepared for future learning than a child who has learnt a great deal in a short time but who has not really had the opportunity to assimilate and practice what he or she has learnt.

### **Early Childhood Education: Concept and Development**

Early childhood has been defined as a period of life between 3 to 8 years of age. This is the period of greatest growth and development, when the brain develops most rapidly, almost at its fullest, (Evans, 2002). It is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established.

It is generally believed that the child's early years constitute the period of most rapid and permanent learning. By age four, about 50% of intellectual development potential of the child is already in place, (Onwuegbu, 2019). Enhancing the quality of young children's lives is now a national and international priority, expressed through research and policy initiatives, programme development and advocacy. This therefore may explain the increasing global attention being given to early childhood education. According to the national policy on education given to a child in an educational institution prior to his entering primary school. This level includes the crèche, the nursery, and the kindergarten. This can also be called pre-primary education programme. Brabre (2003) stated that the years between birth and age five are the foundation upon which successful (or otherwise) lives are built. Ajayi (2008) affirms that the first five years is critical for a child's overall development and later life chances. Odiagbe (2015) asserted that ECE is the term commonly used to describe the formal teaching and care of young children by people other than their families or in settings outside of the home. Early childhood and care education span the human life from birth to age eight. However, early childhood and care education covers the period from birth to when a child starts school. Early Childhood Education, according to Brabre (2003), is actually the first part of basic education and must be given priority and accorded appropriate workforce for effective service delivery. Mishra (2008) posits that Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to a wide range of programmes, all aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter primary school theoretically from birth to age 7 or 8 years. Ibiam and Ugwu (2009) defined early childhood education as that which is designed to develop the habits, attitudes and skills needed

for primary education, while Harkonen (2004), maintains that the concept of early childhood education only covers the practice of early childhood education and learning of the child. Similarly, Hujala (2002) posits that early childhood education in Finland deals with the process of Care, Education and Teaching of the child to ensure that he or she effectively acquires basic skills to cope with the primary stage of schooling. UNESCO and UNICEF (2012), further define the term early childhood education (ECE) as a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain, support and aid the holistic development of children, from birth to age 8. Woodhead (2006) affirms that the early years are formative of children's long-term prospects. According to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), scientific arguments for recognizing the early years as a sensitive period (developmental '*prime-time*') have received tantalizing endorsement in recent decades through advances in neuroscience. (Rutter & Rutter, 1993). The earliest months of life are also the period of most rapid synapse formation constructing the dense networks of neural connectivity on which cortical activity depends. Synaptic density which is assumed to be an indicator of intelligence, increases most between birth to 2 years of age i.e. (when it is 50% higher than for more mature adults). Densities decline gradually over the period from 2 to 16 years of age. Early Childhood Education summarily is seen as the first formal form of education given to children between the ages of 1 to 6 years and learning is usually through play by the use of toys, games and so on.

### **The scientific study of the child's intellectual growth rate.**

The world beams its searchlight on the scientific study of the child. The United Nations General Assembly declared 1979 as the International year of the child (IYC), and that drew world's attention to the present condition and to the future of the with special attention to the general well-being and development of the child. The study also reveals that children learn faster as they grow at the tender age. A careful study of an average child in the home has revealed that childhood art can be divided into certain growth stages, which enables the understanding of the developmental stages of children in relation to their dexterity and creative expressions. Piaget, for instance, spent many years studying children's intellectual development, and became convinced that children undergo a series of developmental stages from birth to age eighteen (Onwueghu, 2019). Based on findings, this paper hereby makes a proposal for classification of the child art into four intellectual growth stages, namely: the stage of linear amusement, the stage of media acquaintance, the stage of imaginative skills and the stage of realistic circumstances as recorded during simple observations. Based on precedents, this section therefore draws energy from the intellectual works of some progenitors of child intellectual study, like Piaget and Lowenfield to make the following proposals.

### **Research Design**

The research instrument adopted in this study is studio experimentation/observation. This is an experimental study which was conducted in two arts and crafts studios of the NVRI Staff (primary and nursery) School Vom, and Arise and Shine Private School, Bukuru, all of Jos-LGA, Plateau State Nigeria. It employed observation methods to record the performances of the different ages of pupils concerning the use of the 3Hs (hand head and heart) to achieve good craftsmanship education. The observational tests were recorded pictorially and discussed theoretically.

## Findings

### Nursery: The stage of linear art (Age 1 – 3 years)



Plates 1 and 2: Showing kindergarten children displaying their art of scribbling



Plates 3, 4, 5 and 6: Showing nursery pupils displaying their art of colouring, craft of paper construction and craft of moulding clay.

## Observations

1. The child, scribbles unknowingly on the sand as the he or she crawls from one end to the other. their movements create all manner of lines in an unconscious, and non-representational manner (using his fingers, knees and toes) but are expressive of his crawling movement.
2. The child scribbles non-representational lines or drawings on paper or any flat surface when he or she starts handling writing materials such as pencil, crayon chalk etc. An adult artist can however make some sense out of such non-representational impressions.
3. As the child advances the age of three he or she can interact consciously with any available mark-rendering media like pencil, pen, crayon, chalk, charcoal, as well as other materials like paper, and clay and can be skillfully taught to make representational impressions (marks, lines, textures, and images). From close observations, healthy and playful children have pleasure in holding writing medium (pencil or crayon) to roll impressions in a garbled, no directional, freehand manner. This can be referred to as random scribbling (plates 1 and 2). Before children master the art of writing and spelling, they first engage in rendering random scribbling in disorganized concentric circles, running rigidly over and under sometimes with intuitions. This can be considered to be the first attempt of the child so ever to show drawing skill and a predictably sure foundation for being an artist/craftsman or any other creatively-rendering profession. Looking at the child scribbles and its personality and psychology, one cannot but say that it represents the emotion of the child's personal

and free-and-easy character. The results of handling mark-rendering media or any designing material could seem meaningless to an adult or even to the child itself, but it is expressive of the child's subconscious mind.

### **Primary: The stage of media acquaintance (Age 5 - 8)**



**Plates 7, 8, 9 and 10: Showing primary pupils displaying their craft of paper Mache, clay work, mat making and the art of drawing.**

### **Observations**

1. This is the stage that the child is more media-friendly. He or she can distinguish between the mark-rendering media like pencil, biro, crayon, chalk and charcoal as well as clay, paper, cartons etc. A little more consciously than the previous (linear amusement) stage.
  2. The child is able to cherish writing, drawing, and moulding materials and handle them with some level of appreciation.
  3. Children of this level claim all things within their reach to themselves saying "my own;" "my own". This trait in children is helpful to them in media acquaintance and design appreciation.
  4. At this stage also, the child can watch the adult moulding objects like pot, house, plate and other simple household things with mediums like clay or paper, and can be handled by the child more expressively than in the previous stages. No doubt, the child is confronted with tasks and realistic circumstances. He or she becomes a little more matured with developed sensual perception which is needed to render creativity to impress the beholder of his or her work.
  5. The child expresses its unsolicited skills in a self-pleasing way. The artist/craftsman in the child begins to show up as previous experience crops into the new challenges.
- Children in Nursery and Primary Schools in Nigeria are delighted in creating moving and animated forms. These occupy their time, keen interest and also their concept of material possession. They are guided in doing this in the school and they continue the art/craft at home in a playful way.

### **Importance of Arts and Crafts to The Child's Educational Development**

Based on the findings above, the following assertion can be said to be the potentials or importance of arts and crafts to the child's educational development.

- i. Improving Coordination or Motto skills:** Simple activities like using scissors, brushes, spatulas and so on can help improve a child's ability to do things like tying/polishing shoes, knotting tie, sewing with thread and needle, bead works, molding objects with clay, folding cards to create objects like kites, fans caps and so on. Kohl (2015), opines that when kids use their hands to do art/craft, they improve their fine motor skills.
- ii. Communication Skill:** When children make art or craft projects, they are undoubtedly proud of it. In fact, they will probably tell the story all about the project. That is how they conceive

the ideas, and the processes they embark from the beginning to completion of their crafty creations, (Ke, 2023).

**iii. Critical Thinking:** In making art and crafts, children can make choices depending on what they want. For example, a child painting a picture or making a truck can choose the colour (s) and size (s) of the painting or the truck. After the final product, it is easy for him or her to know whether their decision was right or wrong based on his or her ability to critically think.

**iv. Self-Esteem:** Art and craft activities give kids a sense of achievement and allow them to take pride in their work which builds confidence. Making art and craft is a great and safe way for children to discover that it is very normal to make mistakes and that getting things 'wrong' at the beginning can lead to a whole new idea and Self-esteem.

**v. Arithmetic/Mathematical Development:** When children engage in practicing arts and crafts, they get to learn about and recognize different shapes and sizes of objects and materials.

**vi. Creativity:** A child who engages in arts and crafts can come up with new ideas from it. It also fosters mental growth in children by providing opportunities for trying out new ideas, new ways of thinking and problem-solving.

**vii. Open to opportunities:** Art and craft has a crucial role at the centre of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; moving STEM into STEAM fosters creativity, innovation, and economic growth. Ball, (2008). Art, craft and design support and service other subjects, industries and sectors. They provide an introduction to potential skills and careers in other life endeavours; in other words, springboards to learning other subjects and professions.

## Discussions

It is truly observed, as noted in Mishra, (2008) that some of the most available and cheapest materials a child could use for creative expression are paper, colour (crayon) and clay. Observations proved that clay and paper moulding assignments given to the pupil under study were exciting to them presumably because of the 'play ways' methods of handling the simple materials - clay and paper. This went in line with the position of (Ke, 2023). That things that appear to children as playthings is always interesting to them. The methodology of the teachers was very useful in the teaching of skills of dexterity. It was also discovered that the fun in the art of moulding with the hand as shown in plates 4, 5 and 6 really kept the pupils' hand, head and heart busy and concentrated.

The projects the pupils were exposed to further stimulated their creative potentials as suggested in Kohl (2015). Specifically, the child should be involved in traditional artistic/craftsmanship serving as a basis in the first instance, as a cultural order for organizing a physical pattern, preparatory for a future world of work, and lifelong education. It is noteworthy to state that compositional adventures of art and craft and their modifications to suit modern society can only be fruitful when classroom orientations are accentuated by homework. In order to bring a renewed vigor into the aspect of creativity of the child that suggests constructions, formal lessons in basic design is also expedient to bridge some docile gaps between the home and the classroom.

Nevertheless, the approach to creative craftsmanship skill that would instigate a new appearance of formative and formulative principles in the child is envisaged by group activities. In these lie the interactive and 'intra-relative romance of design decisions with results, commitment to collective responsibility, and providing prototypes of collective oriented goals (Fatuyi, 2016). Craftsmanship training of the child through group activities engenders collective methods of character education and the zeal to forge solutions to common problems under strict adult supervision. These interactions are combined with opportunities created so that the youth could also reciprocate it through the younger children and their parents as to continue to have an opportunity to express their interpretations to, and relationships with works of art (Sims, 2012). The continuing, physical, emotional and psychological involvement of peer-groups in art and craft training programmes could assist to provide a new discovery.

## **Conclusion**

Increased emphasis on child development through art and craft, using the principle of “catching them young” is of the essence. It would ignite considerable foundational interest and development of the child’s creative instinct and abilities. Children are not afraid to grab any medium at their disposal in order to express themselves in any manner. Home-given education is pre-primarily important and helpful in discovering the child and determining which other schools or career education the child should pursue.

The identified ways that art and craft help to prepare or develop children to face challenges in life as they grow are critical and will help a great deal in determining their future. That is to say what their future careers or professions will look like, and how they will be useful to the society or the environment they found themselves later in life largely depends on the training they get or skills were imparted in them as children. Life itself is a teacher, and what an individual learn from his/her childhood has a great influence on what becomes of them years later. Therefore, art/craft is a sure way in shaping the child’s future, helping them to be useful to himself, family, their immediate community and the larger society.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations may help in the educational development of children from the perspective of art and craft:

1. Teachers should engage children with talks about arts and craft. This will improve their communication skills, even in other areas. During the talk, they can also pick up vocabulary from the conversation. This will also make their parents better understand their feelings, as expressed through their arts and crafts.
2. Parents should encourage their children and wards in art and craft by buying them materials such as marking pencils, poster-colours, ball-pens, brushes, colouring books, clay, spatulas, cardboards, gums, and other fun and engaging items. Naturally, parents first teachers of children at home, though they may not necessarily have deep pedagogical skills, but they must devise a means of inculcating art/craft education in their wards. This will go a long way towards ensuring the overall good development of their children. If they spot design gift, no matter how little in their children, they should make bold to encourage it without prejudice. Children should be encouraged to think and talk about what they see and feel as well as record them expressively in methods and materials, which correspond with their age and experiential abilities.
3. Government should ensure that they encourage pupils towards art and craft by providing adequate children-instructional materials in preprimary and primary schools, adequate learning environment for children, employing enough qualified (skillful) teachers.

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